

"Whether it is bringing joy to sick kids, voluntary rescue work, football training for young people or the organisation of a festival of opinion culture, you have all noticed those who need help or support; you have noticed what your neighbourhood – or Estonia in general – needs," told the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who presented badges of honour to this year's Volunteers of the Year in conjunction with Kodukant (Estonian Village Movement) at a national event in Türi Cultural Centre.

According to President Ilves, capable civic community is a natural part and real strength of each and every free country, as only those who care for their country and their people can do voluntary work.

"This can only be done at one's free will, in countries where there is no need to be in fear of a rebuke from higher authority and where different opinions and positions are welcome; where people can boldly speak up and thereby contribute to making their country better," stated the Head of State, who added that "voluntary activities help to maintain our open and healthy society."

"This, in turn, will help to reduce indifference and alienation all around us, and it will contribute to making Estonia bigger and better," President Ilves told.

This year, 156 proposals were received for the recognition of volunteers; the decision on the final awards was made by an advisory committee.

This year, enterprise Fontes PMP OÜ was acknowledged for facilitating the voluntary efforts of its employees in third sector organisations.

The associations or individuals who have consistently lead and guided volunteers and involved them in various activities as well as maintained and encouraged their participation were also recognised at the event. This year, six individuals were acknowledged for involving volunteers: Marianne Bruhn (works at SA Heategevusfond Minu Unistuse Päev (charity foundation the Day of My Dream), Kaie Holm (responsible for involving volunteers at Tallinn Central Library), Vilve Kirs (involvement of volunteers in Virumaa rescue zone), Ivika Nõgel (involvement of volunteers

within the framework of the third sector initiative

Maale elama

(Come and Live in Country)), Natalja Mahnova (involvement of volunteers at VitaTiim informal education centre), the Festival of Opinion Culture and Kristi Liiva.

Badges were presented to ten volunteers who have consistently worked to support Estonian society: Viive Etverk (volunteer at Haapsalu Social House), Jaan Tulk (volunteer at Soometsa Village Society), Kristiina Treial (volunteer at Foundation Kiusamise vastu (Antibullying)), Henri Laupmaa (volunteer at

Teeme Ära

(Let's Do It), People's Assembly and the Festival of Opinion Culture), Gianna Leiten (volunteer at

Eesti Juhtkoerte Kasutajate Ühing

(Estonian Association of Guide Dog Users)), Hergo Tasuja (coaches young football players in Emmaste, Käina and Kärdla), Evelin Tamm (volunteer

SA Tartu Ülikooli Kliinikumi Lastefond

(Tartu University Hospital Children's Foundation), Helena Heidemann (volunteer at MTÜ (NGO) Silmaring), Reet Viira (volunteer at

Kodukant

, the Estonian Village Movement Saaremaa, county level co-ordinator of

Teeme Ära

(Let's Do It) effort) and Jüri Ehandi (volunteer at Estonian Scouts Association).

In 2014, volunteers are acknowledged and appreciated within the framework of Märka

Vabatahtlikku

(Notice the Volunteer) project by

Kodukant

, the Estonian Village Movement. The project is supported by the National Foundation of Civil Society. This year, the event is celebrating its 10th anniversary – the appreciation and recognition of volunteers at national level was started in 2005 by the Open Estonia Foundation.

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